

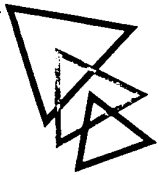
NIEHS Report to Congress on EMF

Written Testimony Provided to:

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences for the
EMF RAPID Research and Education Program

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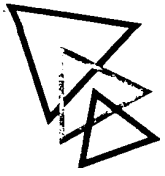
October 1, 1998
San Francisco, California



The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) “Report to Congress” provides an important opportunity to summarize the current scientific understanding, provide a perspective on the public health implications, and help provide for the continued resolution of the key scientific and policy issues. It is important that the NIEHS Report to Congress highlight the progress that has been made, effectively communicate this to the public, and help to create a framework for continued progress.

Policy

Since 1988 Edison has worked with stakeholders in California to establish a comprehensive set of “precaution-based” EMF policies. These have included working with the California Department of Education for the siting and construction of new schools. In 1990, we requested that the California Public Utility Commission convene a Stakeholders Advisory Committee, which published a series of policy recommendations. These were adopted in 1992 and resulted in the creation of EMF Design Guidelines for the siting of new electric utility facilities (attached). When coupled with aggressive research programs, balanced public and employee communications, these “precaution-based” policies are an effective means of responding to the scientific uncertainty (see attached Edison EMF Policy). Our concern is that the NIEHS EMF Report to Congress will undermine these programs and jeopardize the safe, reliable, and economic operation of the nations electric utility system.



Recommendation:

The primary value of the NIEHS EMF RAPID program has been to narrow the health concerns and to help focus future research. Over simplification of the current scientific understanding harms people's ability to better understand what we know, what we don't know, or what the implications are. This makes it harder for individuals and organizations to set effective interim policies, which have been the hallmark of our response to the EMF issue. The report should reject the use of the IARC Criteria and summarize the scientific issues using common usage language.

Public Communication

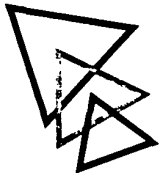
Communication which distorts the underlying scientific understanding will tend to undermine our ability to achieve individual and public health priorities. Using scientifically misleading statements creates conflicting viewpoints which leads to the general mistrust of the scientific community. This will ultimately cause the erosion of support for science, since science will not be seen as useful when people make decisions. Because investments in scientific research will not be seen as trustworthy, we will also weaken our best research and public health agencies and inevitability lead to adverse individual health impacts across a wide spectrum of public health issues (e.g., lead exposure).



Recognizing that there is harm from either over-emphasizing or under-emphasizing potential health risks, Edison has tried to provide useful and balanced information for our employees and customers. These programs have been in place since 1988. In 1992, we opened an “EMF Education Center” for the use of our employees and residents of our communities. Since 1994, we have included information to every customer in annual bill inserts (attachments). We also commissioned a more detailed review of the scientific literature for use by government decision makers (attached).

Recommendation:

The NIEHS EMF Report to Congress should seek to unify the current scientific understanding, with particular reference to the conclusions found in the recent National Academy of Sciences EMF report, the NIEHS EMF RAPID Symposia reports, the NIEHS EMF Working Group report, and the individual study results published in the scientific literature. You should do this without relying on scientific jargon or technically incorrect summary statements. Paraphrasing Albert Einstein, your public communication should be as simple as possible, but not more so.

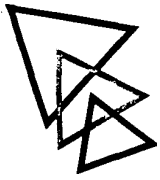


Future EMF Research

The Southern California Edison Company has sponsored research on electric and magnetic fields since 1978. We have supported the U.S. federal programs, the California Department of Health Services, the Electric Power Research Institute, and most recently, the US RAPID programs. The funding of future EMF research should not be driven by creating a “public controversy”. Research in this area is, and should be, based on it’s scientific merits and public health priority. Research funding should not be based on the political strength of the stakeholders. The real strength of our investments in scientific research come from a maintaining a diverse portfolio, funded by a range of private and public research programs. This creates strength by providing for greater diversity in the EMF research and also enhances the ability for each agency to carry out it’s mission. It is inappropriate to create a new “special-interest” federal research program around a single exposure.

Recommendation:

The full range of federal agencies that conduct research should be encouraged to fund hypothesis-driven research proposals that are among the best submitted. Each individual agency, or NIH study section, is the most appropriate level to make final funding decisions. The benefits of isolating EMF research into a single program are not apparent.



Summary and Conclusions

It is important that the electricity supply industry, their employees, customers, and the relevant governmental agencies are provided with relevant, timely, and credible technical information about the potential health impacts from exposure to power-frequency electric and magnetic fields (EMF). Since the mid-1960's, research on electric and magnetic fields has been undertaken by a wide range of stakeholders. A large number of studies have been undertaken with thousands of reports now available in the scientific literature. At this time, a health hazard has not been established from exposure to EMF, nor have we identified the specific characteristics of electric or magnetic fields that should be considered harmful.

The NIEHS "EMF Report to Congress" provides the NIEHS management and scientific team an opportunity to help society realize the value of our cumulative investment in EMF research and set the foundation for continued progress.

In summary, the NIEHS EMF Report to Congress provides an opportunity to help resolve the scientific questions and provide fair and balanced information to a wide range of stakeholders. Real progress has been made. We look forward to a report from the NIEHS that will help us continue to responsibly address the policy, communication, and research needs. This will lead to the most effective resolution of this issue and help create strong partnerships in our future.